

## Ralph Anderson WWII Experiences

Shortly after high school on June 11, 1945, Ralph took the Inter Urban<sup>1</sup> to Fort Douglas in Salt Lake City and reported for induction into the army. He was turned down because he had albumin poisoning<sup>2</sup> in his liver. This touch of albumin poisoning was what kept Ralph out of combat. It wasn't until August 14<sup>th</sup> that Japan finally surrendered.

Ralph would possibly have been one of the troops that were scheduled to invade Japan in 1946. Military analysts projected that the invasion would be extremely difficult with a tremendous loss of life on both sides once the Allies set foot on Japan, but the dropping of the atomic bombs made the planned invasion unnecessary. It is estimated that millions of lives were saved as a result.

Ralph had to report again for induction on November 9<sup>th</sup>. This time he was accepted into the army and had to report to Fort Douglas in Salt Lake two days later and was shipped out to Camp Joseph T. Robinson in Little Rock Arkansas for basic training.

Basic training was very difficult for most of the new recruits but it didn't compare to life on the farm that Ralph was accustomed to. He said, *"When I went into Basic Training I weighed 155 pounds, and when I got out (since I got all the food I wanted to eat and plenty of exercise) I weighed over 200 pounds. After working the way we had been, Basic Training was like a vacation. I remember two guys hung themselves because it was so tough. There was a lot of belly aching and crying, but really it wasn't that hard."*

Ralph learned to shoot from his mother. He said, *"My mother learned how to shoot by shooting rats in the chicken coop. She was a good shot. She learned that the further away she was, the higher she had to aim. She also learned how to compensate for the wind. When I was in the army, of course it was kind of luck shooting at 500 yards, but using what she taught me about the wind and things, I could hit the target. She also taught me that once you hit the bulls eye, stop shooting."*

Ralph was very good on the firing range. He made sharpshooter. At 500 yards he could hit the bulls eye nearly every time. He was so good that they shut the range down and brought everyone over to watch him shoot. When Ralph realized that the army was very impressed with his shooting he realized that maybe it wasn't such a good idea. He thought, *"What in the world am I doing? With the war going on they might have me behind the enemy lines picking off some general. So I started missing some after that."*

It wasn't all that easy to shoot at a target 500 yards away to make it even harder, it was winter in Arkansas and it was very cold. They were on the firing line freezing to death and they were so cold that they could hardly manipulate the bolt action on their rifle when the sergeant would holler, *"WE COLD? NO! WE'RE NEVER COLD!"*

One thing that the new recruits were taught was how to fight. Ralph talked of one experience, *"The Drill Sergeant was training us in hand-to-hand combat. He was showing us*

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<sup>1</sup> The Inter Urban railroad was a commuter train that ran from Provo to Ogden.

<sup>2</sup> Albumin is a protein that is found in the human body. Low Albumin levels can be a sign of many diseases but it also can be caused by something as normal as dehydration. The doctors wanted to give Ralph some time to see if his body could fix the problem naturally.

*how to get out of certain holds. He told me to put him in a Full Nelson<sup>3</sup> and no matter what, not to let him go. So I put a Full Nelson on him and about a half-hour later he said, "Would you please let me go"? He tried everything under the sun to get out of it, but it didn't work."*

After basic training Ralph was stationed at Camp Kearns (located in Kearns, Utah) and was able to come home for short visits. He transferred from the infantry to the Army Air Corp and was scheduled to be shipped overseas to become one of the first occupation troops in Japan. (The Army Air Corp was the precursor to the US Air Force.)

On March 5<sup>th</sup> 1946 Ralph was transferred to Camp Stoneman which is near Pittsburg, California, (about 40 miles northeast of San Francisco.) Camp Stoneman was the principal "jumping off point" for American soldiers destined for military operations in the Second World War's Pacific Theater. This is where soldiers received complete physicals and a battery of inoculations to prevent diseases peculiar to Pacific destinations.

On the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup> Ralph left from Camp Stoneman and traveled down the Sacramento River to San Francisco where they got on the boat that was to take them to Japan. The ship they put them on was a Liberty Ship.

Liberty ships were cargo ships that were cheap and relatively easy to build. They were designed to be put together quickly (the average around 42 days per ship,) to replace the ships that were constantly being sunk by the German U-boats. These ships were not built for comfort. They were built to get all types of cargo, including human, to their destination.

The bunks where they put the troops were down in the hold. Typically there were several hundred men in the same hold with canvas cots stacked four to five high. Space aboard the ship was precious. No one was ever more than 6 feet from someone else. Sanitary conditions got worse as the trip wore on. Water was precious on a ship so they used seawater to shower with. This would be bad enough but it was made worse by the fact that nearly everyone on board got seasick after a couple of days and couldn't keep anything down.

Ralph recalled, *"We left at night and I slept good, but when I got up the next morning, every soldier on that ship was seasick and was puking all over; from the top bunk down to the bottom."* I can only imagine the smell of that crowded hold. One soldier recalled, *"The captain had the crew remove the hatch cover of our hold, and I swear the birds fell out of the sky from the stench."*

Ralph was one of the lucky ones that didn't get sick but because everyone else was, they didn't serve any meals for several days. Those that weren't sick had to live on C-rations or K-rations. These were pre-made meals that were packaged so they would last without refrigeration for long periods of time. After about a week everyone started getting used to the rolling of the ship and they started serving meals again.

One night they announced over the intercom that they were 300 miles north of Hawaii. Shortly afterwards they ran into the edge of a typhoon. The winds reached 70 to 80 miles per hour and created very large waves. Every time the waves battered the ship it would shudder. Liberty ships had the reputation of coming apart so I'm sure as one soldier put it, *"terror was normal."* The soldiers had to stay in the hold hanging on to whatever they could while they rode

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<sup>3</sup> A Full Nelson is a wrestling hold where you stand behind your opponent and put both arms under his and lock your hands behind your opponent's neck.

the storm out. Ralph said, *"I remember they would face the ship into the storm. You could feel the front end come out of the ocean, then it would come down with a BOOM! Then the rear end would come out and you could hear the propellers swirling for a minute, then they would go back in. Then the front end would come out again and go BOOM! It lasted for a couple of days."*

Ralph was a little reluctant to get on the ship at first but he kind of liked being on the sea. After 16 days on the Pacific Ocean Ralph was finally able to disembark in Yokohama, Japan. Then it was on board a train headed for the Itazuke Army Air Base in northern Kyushu, (which is the southern island in Japan,) a distance of over 500 miles. On the way to the base the train went right through what was once Hiroshima<sup>4</sup>.

Ralph arrived in Japan just over seven months after the atomic bomb was dropped on the city of Hiroshima. He remembered, *"I got to Japan right after the Atomic Bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The railroads went right through Hiroshima. There wasn't anything left there except in the distance there were some steel girders sticking up in the air."*

The Itazuke Army Air Base is located on the northern tip of Kyushu near the city of Fukuoka. The base was built just two years earlier by the Japanese Army Air Force and was known as Mushiroda. The base was used by the Japanese 6<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing as an air defense base. In April 1945, the base was used by Japanese bombers and was very active until late in the war when it was destroyed by American B-29's.

In October 1945 the first Americans arrived at the base. The base needed a lot of work done to make it usable again. The runway was marked with bomb craters and the only building that survived the American bombing was one aircraft hangar. The base commander used local Japanese men and women to rebuild the base. It gave them work and a chance to earn money to improve their lives.

There was very little housing on the base. Ralph and the rest of the men were bussed to and from the base each day from the Kyushu Airplane Company, that was nearby and had been converted into a barracks. It had escaped wartime destruction. Ralph lived in a warehouse that had half of it converted into a barracks by adding cubicles. Ralph lived in his cubicle with 8 other men. Seven of the men were non-commissioned officers, but Ralph said, *"They're all pretty good guys though, so I don't hold their rank against them."*

The main thing everyone seemed to have a problem with was the rats. They seemed to be everywhere. Ralph remembered, *"All I can really remember were the rats. There were rats everywhere. They would scare you to death. The guy who was the Branch President was the exterminator, and it was his job to poison the rats. He had one guy who stayed with him steady. His name was Kuman Modo. The rest of the guys with him, as soon as they would find out they were poisoning rats, would quit because they were Buddhists. They didn't believe in killing animals."*

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<sup>4</sup> At 8:15 the morning of August 6, 1945 a B29 bomber nicknamed Enola Gay dropped the first operational atomic bomb. Nicknamed *"Little Boy"*, the bomb was 9'-9" long and weighed nearly 8,000 pounds. Dropped by parachute the bomb exploded about 1,885 feet above the city. The resulting fireball and blast shock waves reduced an area of 5 square miles to ashes and destroyed countless others further away. It is estimated that nearly 200,000 people lost their lives. Countless others suffered from the effects of the bomb.

*You would be on guard duty and the rats would be running across in front of you. We lived in what used to be an airplane factory. They had built cubicles about 12 feet by 12 feet and they had walls on them about 8 feet high. At night, you could lay and watch the rats running along the tops of the walls. I remember one night hearing a rat running and then SPLAT! It had jumped right in the first sergeants face. Everyone had a bed and a footlocker. You wouldn't leave your footlocker open unless you were right there watching it. If you did, a rat would get in it. I hung my mackinaw (winter coat) up for about an hour or two, and when I reached up to get it, there was a rat making a nest in it."*

Ralph was part of the 38<sup>th</sup> Air Engineer Squadron. He said, *"I was kind of a firefighter on the air base. I was also an armament technician. I repaired 50 caliber machine guns that went on the airplanes. The only fire I can remember was a transport plane hauling liquor, and it burned up big time. We lived a ways from the air base in an airplane factory and traveled back and forth by bus. Then they kind of shipped everyone out<sup>5</sup>, and me and a guy named Ursebach from Mt. Pleasant stayed behind. I was a Teletype operator with him until I came home."*

The Japanese citizens were struggling to survive after the war. Ralph wrote home to his sister Marilyn about the conditions in Japan, *"A few days ago everyone around here was a scratching too. There were lice and bugs all over the place. Japan is a lot different than America. In America everybody is clean [and] gets enough to eat so they are happy. Here in Japan everything is dirty and [a lot] of people are hungry and sick and don't have any homes to live in. America sure is a good place to live. When soldiers walk down the streets the little 'Japs' come out and ask them for candy and gum. They call candy and gum 'chewing gum OK'"*

Ralph remembered, *"The army always wanted you to enlist. If you enlisted, you could get out of the army sooner. I wouldn't enlist, and I wouldn't join the army reserve either. If I would have, I would have gone to Korea when I got home. I remember leaving when guys who had enlisted stayed behind with tears in their eyes."*

By December 13<sup>th</sup> 1946 Ralph was all processed and was waiting for a ship to take him home. Ralph was finally able to get a ship and leave Tokyo, Japan at 3:00am on December 21, 1946. When he got to the docks there were some large ocean liners and he was thinking that he would be going home in style. Unfortunately, they marched the men right back on another Liberty ship. A little over an hour after Ralph left the dock an 8.5 magnitude earthquake struck Japan.

Thankfully Ralph had a relatively uneventful trip back to the states. While Ralph was on the ship coming home on December 31, 1946, President Truman officially declared World War II over. Ralph was sent to Camp Beale in California where he was discharged from military service.

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<sup>5</sup> The 38<sup>th</sup> air Engineer Squadron was based on the Itazuke Army Air Base until October 30, 1946 then it was transferred to the Itami army Air Base. Ralph remained behind because he was needed at Itazuki.



Ralph in middle working on a .50 caliber machine gun.



Ralph on right in their cubicle